

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MOSCOW 02224 161526Z
ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJECT: SOVIET REACTION TO KRIMSKY-ALEKSEYEV AFFAIR

REF: (A) MOSCOW 1676, (B) MOSCOW 2122

1. FEBRUARY 16 "LITERATURNAYA GAZETA" WENT TO CONSIDERABLE LENGTH (TWO FULL COLUMNS) TO PUBLISH INTERVIEW WITH MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT CHIEF VSEVOLOD SOFINSKIY ON SOVIET VIEW OF KRIMSKY-ALEKSEYEV EXPULSIONS AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IN USSR. ENTITLED, "THE SPIRIT OF HELSINKI AND THE JOURNALIST'S MISSION," ARTICLE, WHICH WAS ALSO EXCERPTED AND CARRIED ON TASS WIRE, HAS NOTICEABLY DEFENSIVE TONE AND NO DOUBT INDICATES SOVIET SENSITIVITY OVER ADVERSE PUBLICITY ENGENDERED BY KRIMSKY'S BEING THROWN OUT. VOA COMES IN FOR PARTICULAR CRITICISM.

2. INTERVIEW IS, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, FIRST REAL ATTEMPT TO DEAL IN PUBLIC WITH KRIMSKY EXPULSION (TASS ITEM CARRIED IN ALL MAJOR PAPERS LAST WEEK ON STATE DEPARTMENT ACTION AGAINST ALEKSEYEV DID NOT MENTION KRIMSKY, SIMPLY SAYING DEPARTMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 MOSCOW 02224 161526Z

HAD TAKEN ACTION ON BASIS SOME ALLEGED "RECIPROCITY"). IN JUSTIFYING SOVIET TREATMENT OF KRIMSKY, SOFINSKIY DENIES ANY TIE-IN WITH HELSINKI ACT AND REPEATS WELL-WORN ACCUSATIONS THAT KRIMSKY WAS ENGAGED IN "ACTIVITIES HAVING NOTHING IN COMMON WITH JOURNALISM." VIOLATION OF FOREIGN CURRENCY REGULATIONS IS, AS HAS BEEN CONSISTENTLY SO ALL ALONG, THE ONLY IDENTIFIABLE LEGAL PEG UPON WHICH SOFINSKIY CHOOSES TO HANG

HIS ACCUSATION. HOWEVER, TWICE SOFINSKIY USES FANCY FOOTWORK TO LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN -- ONCE BY SAYING KRIMSKY'S ILLEGAL ACTIVITY "INCLUDED" CURRENCY CHARGE AND AGAIN BY CITING CURRENCY MATTER "AND OTHER THINGS (I DRUGIMI DELAMI)."

3. PICKING UP ON POINTED REFERENCE USED BY KHAZOV ON FEBRUARY 4 WHEN HE FORMALLY TOLD KRIMSKY TO PACK HIS BAGS, SOFINSKIY NOTES THAT SOVIETS HAD MADE THEIR POSITION CLEAR ".MORE THAN ONCE" TO AP AND THAT "YOUR PAPER (I.E., LITGAZ) ALSO WROTE ABOUT KRIMSKY'S 'AFFAIRS.' THAT IS TO SAY, WE REPEATEDLY POINTED OUT THE REASONS FOR WHICH THIS CORRESPONDENT COULD BE EXPELLED FROM THE COUNTRY." THUS, SOVIETS AGAIN IMPLYING ATTACKS IN LITGAZ VIRTUALLY EQUATED WITH OFFICIAL MFA DEMARCHE. (FYI - WE HAVE HEARD THAT "V. VALENTINOV" SIGNATURE ON FEBRUARY 2 LITGAZ PIECE AND ON SERIES LAST SUMMER IS CRYPTONYM FOR SOFINSKIY OR MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT AS GROUP.)

4. WINDING UP HIS MONOLOGUE ON KRIMSKY PER SE, SOFINSKIY, IN WHAT WE READ AS GLARINGLY OBVIOUS ATTEMPT TO DISPEL STORIES TO THE CONTRARY, SAYS "ONCE MORE I EMPHASIZE THAT THIS MATTER DID NOT CONCERN KRIMSKY'S PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTIC ACTIVITY, BUT RATHER ACTIONS WHICH HAVE NOTHING IN COMMON WITH THE STATUS OF A JOURNALIST."

5. MOVING ON TO ALEKSEYEV, SOFINSKIY PREDICTABLY SAYS U.S. ACTION WAS "UNFOUNDED" AND A VIOLATION OF THE HELSINKI ACCORDS. "ANY UNBIASED PERSON," SAYS SOFINSKIY, CAN SEE IT WAS NOT "RECIPROCITY" TO EXPEL A "JOURNALIST WHO HAD VIOLATED NO LAWS OF THE COUNTRY OF HIS RESIDENCE." PETULANTLY, HE ADDS THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 MOSCOW 02224 161526Z

STATE DEPARTMENT "DID NOT EVEN CONSIDER IT NECESSARY" TO INFORM TASS WASHINGTON BUREAU OF DECISION.

6. "INTERVIEW" THEN SHIFTS GEARS TO SPEND FULL COLUMN REFUTING ALLEGED VOICE OF AMERICA COMMENTS THAT FOREIGN JOURNALISTS HAVE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TIME GAINING ACCESS TO NEWS SOURCES IN USSR. SOFINSKIY TICKS OFF ALL THE WONDERFUL PRESS CONFERENCES AND GROUP TOURS HIS PRESS DEPARTMENT HAS ARRANGED FOR FOREIGN PRESS CORPS, AND COMES TO CONCLUSION THAT USSR DOES MORE FOR INQUIRING JOURNALISTS THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY. VOA CHARGES, HE SAYS, MUST ONLY BE EXPLICABLE AS "PREJUDICED AND ILL-INTENTIONED."

7. COMMENT: WHEN TWO SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AS THE MFA PRESS DIVISION AND LITGAZ POOL THEIR TALENTS, IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE TO FIND SEVERAL FAMILIAR THEMES OF RECENT DAYS CO-MINGLING IN SAME PLACE. KRIMSKY BECOMES ENTWINED IN THE "WE'RE OBSERVING THE HELSINKI PRECEPTS BUT YOU'RE NOT" REFRAIN, AND THE WHOLE IS TIED IN WITH A CONTINUATION OF THE SHARPENING

CRITICISM OF VOA WE HAVE SEEN AND REPORTED ON DURING PAST WEEK.
IT SEEMS, HOWEVER, THAT THE MOST ELOQUENT FEATURE OF SOFINSKIY'S
"INTERVIEW" IS QUITE SIMPLY THE GREAT LENGTHS AND DETAIL
TO WHICH HE GOES IN TRYING TO ANSWER CHARGES WHICH COULD JUST
AS EASILY HAVE BEEN IGNORED.
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